

1/16/13 - Day 11 – General San Martin and Paracas, Peru: About 6am the Amsterdam arrived in the port of General San Martin. General San Martin, Peru is about 125 miles south of Lima Peru as shown on the map. Pisco is the largest city in the region but we were not to visit Pisco today. We were scheduled to take a HAL bus tour of the desert and shore area around General San Martin and the nearby town of Paracas shown on the map below.



General San Martin is a small port located on the Paracas Peninsula. It was named for the heroic General who landed here in 1820 with his army and proceeded to liberate Peru from Spanish rule. It was a moment in Peruvian history, much like Washington crossing the Delaware in American Revolutionary War tradition. Besides the important deep water port facility there is not much to see in General San Martin, as shown in these pictures taken from the ship.



At 9am we boarded our tour bus and met our Peruvian guide named, Abel. Abel explained that we would spend most of the time exploring the Paracas National Reserve and then take a trip into the town of Paracas to visit a textile factory and store.



The bus took us along good blacktopped roads leading across barren desert like that shown in these pictures. Abel said that they typically receive less than 2mm of rain per year (think the thickness of two credit cards). The soil looked like pictures we have seen of the surface on Mars. It's hard to believe that after sailing more than 2500 miles from Florida on the good ship Amsterdam we are in this remote place and still in the same time zone as the folks back home in Tennessee.



After traveling a few miles we arrived at Red Beach. It was named for the coarse red sand that tumbles from a nearby cliff and covers the beach, shown in the picture below.



Thousands of birds were covering the rocks along the coastline. It's not surprising that guano is an important export of Peru.

A Peruvian family was there as tourists. Like us, they were enjoying the day and engaging in the familiar task of capturing a picture of obliging family members.

After a short while we boarded our bus and headed for the next destination.



We arrived at the visitor's center of the Paracas National Reserve after a short drive. Inside the building was an extensive display showing the natural history of the region and the sea life that supports the local economy.



This region was under the ocean millions of years ago but it has been slowly raised above sea level by the Pacific tectonic plate creeping under the South American Plate. The exhibit was very well done and worth the stop.



Leaving the visitor's center we stopped briefly at a spot along the highway where fossils of ancient sea shells were exposed by weathering action.

Speaking of weathering action, it was about here that Abel explained that frequently, particularly in August, the wind can blow at 40 to 50 miles an hour for days at a time. During that period the sands of the desert are picked up and they have a sand storm. In fact the name, Paracas, of the nearby town is the Spanish word meaning "sand storm". We were happy to have avoided that time of year.

Our next objective was the site of the locally famous coastline formation called "The Cathedral". Here wave action over the centuries had carved the rock into an unusual bridge-like shape attached to the sea cliff, as shown in the picture on the right. With a little effort one could imagine the



formation resembled a cathedral. The tourist industry happily labeled it "The Cathedral". Unfortunately, an earthquake in August of 2007 caused the rock bridge to collapse. What we have now is shown in this picture on the left. However, it is still kept on the list of tourist attractions for the area.

What's left of The Cathedral does provide a nice place for thousands of sea birds to make their home, as shown in the picture on the right.

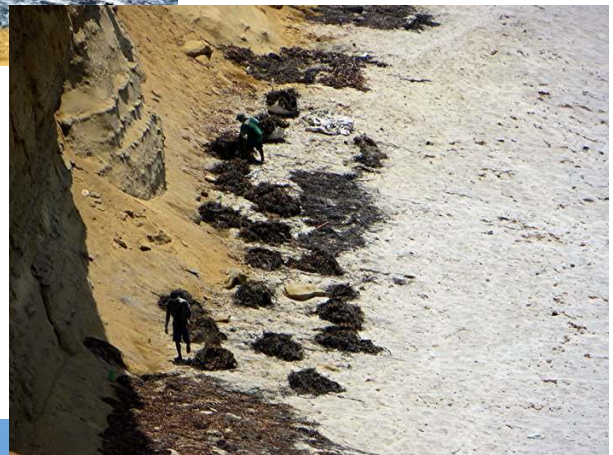
We next went to a cliff-side beach with a beautiful surf line, as shown in the picture below.



When we looked a bit closer at the scene below we noticed that some men were gathering kelp that had washed up on the beach. Abel said that an extract from the kelp

was used in the cosmetic industry.

We continued on our bus ride. We left the Paracas Peninsula, shown on the map above, and headed for the town of Paracas. When we were on the outskirts of Paracas we could see the Amsterdam across the Bay of Paracas, as shown in this picture below.



In Paracas there were signs of sufficient water to support a farming industry.



In view of the extremely low rainfall, we inquired about the source of the water. We were told that they drill wells in the ancient river beds and pump water up from those aquifers to irrigate the farms.



A lot of the housing on the outskirts of Paracas looked more like just shacks and we wondered how they held up under winds of 40 to 50 miles per hour.

As we were passing through Paracas we saw our opportunity to check out the price of gasoline in this remote area, as shown in these pictures. The 90 octane gasoline was selling for 13.80 nuevo sol per gallon. At the current conversion rate that works out to \$5.52 USD per gallon. Not too bad for such a remote location.



We arrived at a textile factory and store for our last stop of the day. We went into a courtyard where an energetic band was playing some traditional Peruvian instruments and giving the event a festive flavor. Several tour buses were making the stop with us so there was a nice crowd of people.



After a short while we were ushered into one of the buildings surrounding the courtyard. This was one of factories where textiles were woven out of cotton fiber. The owner's daughter, Alexandria, got our attention and proceeded to tell us the story of the Sumaqkay Company. Sumaqkay is a family run business that produces some farm products, like tangelos and asparagus, but also produces hand woven fabrics with beautiful patterns designed by Alexandria and her mother. They started with one loom and soon found an eager market. They expanded the number of looms and workers and have been doing well.



The pictures below show some of the textile products on display in the shop.



From the factory floor we went back out into the courtyard and then into the main display room for all their brightly colored goods. Here Barbara and the other ladies found a shopping bonanza, as shown below.



Exercising some restraint we soon exited back out into the courtyard to enjoy the flowers and music from the band.





Abel eventually gathered us all up and we got back on our bus for the return trip to the Amsterdam. On the way back through Paracas we made a brief stop at a monument dedicated to General San Martin and the historic military expedition he led to free Peru from the Spanish. It was made of concrete in the form of a giant white sail, as shown on the right. Very impressive!



We then made our way around the Bay of Paracas and back to the Amsterdam. At the pier were the usual souvenir vendors waiting for us.

We managed to negotiate our way past these temptations and back onto the Amsterdam.

The ship got underway from General San Martin about 5pm. We were on a westerly course headed for the mysterious Easter Island. Many passengers chose this voyage just because of the Easter Island port of call so there will be much anticipation of that visit over the next few days.

